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Review of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth special session: Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

Work of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters held its thirty-sixth session in New York from 31 January to 2 February 2001 and its thirty-seventh session in Geneva from 25 to 27 July 2001.

At its thirty-sixth session, the Board focused its deliberations on four key issues: the "revolution in military affairs", the illicit trade in small arms, reducing nuclear danger and non-proliferation regimes. At its thirty-seventh session, the Board continued its deliberations on the revolution in military affairs and reducing nuclear danger, and also addressed nuclear-weapon-free zones as instruments of disarmament.

The members agreed that there existed "a crisis of multilateral disarmament diplomacy" and that the United Nations had important roles to play in addressing the crisis, including through public education, especially with respect to nuclear disarmament. The Board also agreed that: (a) the revolution in military affairs had profound implications — both positive and negative — for the future of global non-proliferation and disarmament regimes and would require further attention by the Board; (b) the proposal contained in the Millennium Declaration (see General Assembly resolution 55/2) for convening a major international conference on eliminating nuclear dangers would best be pursued through an incremental process given the current lack of a global consensus to convene such a conference; (c) disarmament and non-proliferation regimes were inseparable and mutually dependent upon their wider international strategic environment; (d) disarmament and non-proliferation education offered a valuable means of combating public apathy and complacency about disarmament and non-proliferation issues; and (e) it was important to adhere to the guidelines of the United Nations Disarmament

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Commission in the creation of new nuclear-weapon-free zones and that such zones were a valuable contribution to international peace and security.

In response to General Assembly resolution 55/33 N of 20 November 2000, the Board forwarded to the Secretary-General inputs on information with regard to specific measures that could significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war, suggesting specific measures to reduce nuclear danger. A summary of that discussion is contained in a separate report to the Assembly (A/56/400).

In its capacity as Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the Board approved for submission to the Assembly the report of the Director of the Institute on its activities from July 2000 to July 2001 and the programme of work and budget for 2001 (see A/56/359).

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters held its thirty-sixth session in New York from 31 January to 2 February 2001 and its thirty-seventh session in Geneva from 25 to 27 July 2001 (see annex for the membership of the Board). The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 38/183 O of 20 December 1983. The report of the Board on its work as Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) is contained in a separate document (A/56/359). The inputs of the Board in response to the request made in Assembly resolution 55/33 N of 20 November 2000 on reducing nuclear danger are contained in a separate report of the Secretary-General (A/56/400).

2. Nabil Fahmy, Ambassador of Egypt to the United States of America, chaired the two sessions of the Board in 2001.

3. The present report summarizes the Board's deliberations during the two sessions and the specific recommendations it conveyed to the Secretary-General.

A. General agreement

4. The Board agreed that there currently existed a crisis of multilateral disarmament diplomacy. The Board encouraged the Secretary-General to raise this issue with Member States in all appropriate forums and stressed that the fundamental responsibility for alleviating this crisis remained with the Member States. The Secretary-General could not be expected to resolve this crisis independent of concrete actions from the Member States and sustained efforts from civil society.

5. Recognizing the global implications of disarmament for international peace and security, the Board agreed that the United Nations system must play an active role in promoting disarmament. The Secretary-General's efforts to enhance the capabilities and effectiveness of United Nations organs for disarmament and international peace and security merited the support of all Member States. The Board also supported the efforts of the Secretary-General to rouse public opinion about the importance of achieving disarmament objectives, in particular nuclear disarmament, and strongly encouraged him to continue those efforts as one important means of addressing the present crisis of multilateral disarmament diplomacy.

B. Weapons of mass destruction

6. At both of its 2001 sessions, the Board focused closely on a number of issues concerning threats from weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical and biological weapons) and their implications for the disarmament activities of the United Nations and existing multilateral regimes. Three specific issues appeared on the Board's agendas for those sessions: reducing nuclear danger, non-proliferation regimes and nuclear-weapon-free zones.

7. The Board's deliberations on reducing nuclear danger focused on the search for practical means of implementing the proposal contained in the Millennium Declaration (see resolution 55/2) to hold an international conference on eliminating nuclear dangers. While the Board supported the goal of convening such a conference, it recognized that the international consensus needed to achieve such a goal had not yet materialized. Much of the Board's deliberations thus focused on the relative advantages of alternative incremental steps to promote consensus-building on the need for such a conference, which are described further in section D below.

8. At its thirty-sixth session, the Board considered discussion papers prepared and presented by Hu Xiaodi and William Potter on non-proliferation regimes. The Board agreed that non-proliferation regimes — international arrangements for the control or elimination of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles — were profoundly dependent upon the wider international strategic environment. They also agreed that non-proliferation and disarmament were inseparable issues and that non-proliferation efforts alone would not suffice without demonstrable progress in achieving disarmament commitments. They further agreed that disarmament education was valuable in combating widespread public apathy and complacency, particularly with respect to global nuclear threats. There was less agreement over the extent to which the various weapon regimes should coordinate their activities or the extent to which they were discriminatory. The Board agreed to focus more specifically on nuclear-weapon-free zones at its thirty-seventh session.

C. Nuclear-weapon-free zones

9. At its thirty-seventh session, Nugroho Wisnumurti and Abdul Minty prepared and presented discussion papers on the issue of nuclear-weapon-free zones. The Board agreed that while such zones, taken alone, offered no panacea for the problem of global nuclear disarmament, they advanced that goal by helping to reduce the threats posed by the very existence of nuclear weapons and to advance the incremental process of norm-building. The Board viewed such zones as having wide support in the world community. Given their regional nature, the Board shared the view of the United Nations Disarmament Commission[1] that such zones must be established on the basis of the free will of the parties to the specific regional nuclear-weapon-free-zone treaty. Almost all the members of the Board agreed that such zones continued to play a vital role in disarmament, that they would remain important in the future and, recalling the past contributions of previous Secretaries-General in creating such zones, that the efforts of the United Nations, specifically the Department for Disarmament Affairs, to support the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones merited the support of all Member States.

10. While recognizing the regional nature of nuclear-weapon-free zones, the Board also acknowledged that the prospective parties to new zones could benefit from assistance provided by the United Nations, including the good offices of the Secretary-General in accordance with the principles set forth in the United Nations Disarmament Commission guidelines, in promoting the creation of new zones, in helping to strengthen existing zones and in promoting respect for such zones throughout the world community. The Board agreed on the need for strong support for nuclear-weapon-free zones among the nuclear-weapon States.

11. Efforts are needed throughout the world community to promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts that motivate countries to seek nuclear arms, a goal that could be served by "track II" diplomacy and confidence-building measures. The Board also underscored the importance of legally binding negative security assurances.

D. General Assembly resolution 55/33 N on reducing nuclear danger

12. In its resolution 55/33 N, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to seek inputs from the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters on information with regard to specific measures that would significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war, including the proposal contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration to convene an international conference to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers, and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session. This request followed the issuance of a note by the Secretary-General transmitting a summary of the discussion of the Advisory Board on specific measures that would significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war, along with papers prepared by three Board members: Harald Müller, Guillermo González and Arundhati Ghose (A/55/324).

13. At its thirty-sixth session, the Board's deliberations commenced with three discussion papers presented by Mr. Müller, Ms. Ghose and Boris Pyadyshev (A/56/400, annex I). Those papers and the discussion that followed addressed the following specific measures to reduce nuclear danger: deep reductions, de-alerting and a variety of confidence-building measures among States with large nuclear arsenals; de-alerting and enhanced transparency in States with smaller nuclear arsenals; efforts by nuclear possessors to assist in defusing regional disputes; controls against unauthorized or accidental use; an emphasis at the United Nations on the principle of accountability for progress in disarmament; a review of nuclear doctrines; the elimination of tactical nuclear weapons; cultivation of a norm against the use of nuclear weapons; preparatory work on an international conference on reducing nuclear danger; high-level meetings of the Security Council on disarmament issues; a ban on the use of weapons-usable nuclear materials for peaceful purposes; and annual prizes for news media reporting on disarmament issues.

14. The Board continued its deliberations on this issue at its thirty-seventh session, where it considered discussion papers prepared by Maleeha Lodhi and Mr. Müller (A/56/400, annex II). Those papers echoed and elaborated upon points raised during the earlier sessions and raised some additional issues, including the inclusion of health and environmental damage

resulting from the testing, production, operation and maintenance of nuclear weapons; the significant limitations of missile defence as a means of eliminating nuclear dangers relative to the security gained from global nuclear disarmament; the need for greater attention to the verification of disarmament commitments and the development of measures to deal with violations thereof; the need for an emphasis on public education; the need for multilateral efforts to advance cooperative security rather than the unilateral interests of individual States; controls against the development of new generations of nuclear weapons; controls against regional imbalances of conventional forces; and improvements over the command and control of nuclear forces. Members of the Board were also invited to attend a briefing organized by UNIDIR on de-alerting, featuring a visiting expert from Princeton University, Harold Feiveson.

15. The Board concluded its thirty-seventh session with recommendations on seven measures to reduce nuclear danger: (a) promotion of a regional and global dialogue on cooperative security as an important means of advancing disarmament objectives while reducing and de-emphasizing the perceived security benefits of possessing nuclear weapons; (b) political and technical preparations for an international conference on eliminating nuclear dangers; (c) de-alerting of nuclear weapons as part of a broader effort at threat reduction; (d) review of nuclear doctrines; (e) the elimination of tactical nuclear weapons; (f) measures to promote transparency at the global and regional levels as a means of enhancing international peace and security; and (g) programmes of education and training on the dangers of nuclear weapons (see also A/56/400). The Board encouraged the Secretary-General to urge Member States to move forward in these specific areas.

E. Small arms in the light of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

16. The Board addressed small arms issues at its thirty-sixth session, which preceded the convening in July 2001 of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. The Board considered discussion papers prepared and presented by Rolf Ekeus and Yoshitomo Tanaka as well as Rokiatou Keita. While the members were in full agreement on the importance of the conference, many urged the Board to alert the Secretary-General to growing international security concerns over threats from weapons that initially were legally produced or exported but that were later diverted for illicit use. Many members also stressed the positive contributions that non-governmental groups could make in helping to curb the illicit trade in small arms. As discussed further in section I below, the Board met with representatives of two such groups, which urged various measures to expand the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the deliberations at the United Nations on small arms issues.

17. At its thirty-seventh session, the Board viewed a United Nations film documentary entitled "Armed to the Teeth", concerning the national and global security challenges posed by the illicit trade in small arms. The film was produced by the Department of Public Information in cooperation with the Department for Disarmament Affairs.[2]

F. Revolution in military affairs and its effect on disarmament and arms limitation

18. The Board considered "the revolution in military affairs" extensively at both of its 2001 sessions. Though the term has many definitions, the Board accepted an interpretation offered by Harald Müller stressing three dimensions of the revolution: as a way of thinking about modern armed conflict and arms control; as a matter of the technical capabilities of weapon-enabling systems (e.g., sensors, data-processing capabilities, etc.); and as an issue addressing unique characteristics of new and emerging conventional weapons per se.

19. The Board was briefed during its thirty-sixth session by three experts on the revolution in military affairs, namely, Michael Clarke (Kings College), Michael O'Hanlon (the Brookings Institution) and Ahmed Hashim (Search for Common Ground). At its thirty-seventh session, the Board focused specifically on the outer-space aspects of the revolution in military affairs. The Board considered three discussion papers on this subject prepared and presented by Mr. Hu, Raimundo González and Shai Feldman. For additional specialized expertise on this issue, the members

engaged in a teleconference with three leading American and Russian authorities on the subject: Admiral William Owens (Teledesic LLC), Major General Vladimir Slipchenko (retired) and Sergey Oznobishchev (Institute for Strategic Assessments).

20. The Board agreed that the revolution in military affairs may have some positive value for disarmament and arms control in improving transparency, building confidence, promoting verification, deterring future wars, limiting civilian casualties, reducing obsolete arms, reducing defence budgets, assisting peacekeeping efforts, enforcing peace settlements and speeding the obsolescence of nuclear weapons. The Board also recognized that the revolution posed many potential dangers as well, including increasing the frequency of wars, shifting the focus of military attacks to targets relating to economic infrastructure rather than military forces per se, increasing the lethality of weapons systems, promoting a dangerous action-reaction spiral (arms races, asymmetric responses, terrorism, cyberterrorism, etc.) and requiring expensive new investments in military technology and production. The Board agreed that the central challenge of the revolution in military affairs for future disarmament efforts was how to take advantage of the positive features of the revolution while eliminating or minimizing the risks.

21. The briefings and background reading materials presented the Board with several possible means of reducing the danger of the revolution in military affairs.[3] Examples included working for a ban on high-precision weapons of intercontinental range, prohibiting the use of conventional missiles in strategic submarines, exploring new treaties for "sixth-generation" weapons, banning outer-space weapons, protecting civilian satellites, protecting civilians in war, strengthening the emphasis on diplomacy and the peaceful settlement of disputes (rather than new weapons), considering more closely the regional aspects of the revolution in military affairs, addressing the non-space aspects of the revolution, focusing more on weapons and weapon infrastructures and exploring the implications of the revolution for peacekeeping.

22. The Board recognized the revolution in military affairs as a complicated issue and agreed that further consultations would be required at its next session that might continue even in the inter-sessional period. The Board encouraged further study of this issue because of its profound and multifaceted implications for all countries and also because of the revolution's potential applications for the United Nations in areas other than disarmament, especially in peacekeeping, the peaceful settlement of regional disputes and so on. The Board was not yet prepared, however, to make substantive recommendations on the issue.

G. Outer space

23. The Board is increasingly concerned about the prospect of the weaponization of outer space and its repercussions for international peace and security, including the future of nuclear disarmament. At its thirty-seventh session, the Board considered specifically the outer-space aspects of the revolution in military affairs (see previous section).

24. The Board supports the prohibition of the weaponization of outer space and encourages the Secretary-General to assign this issue a high priority. The Board specifically urged the Secretary-General to stress the legal issues pertaining to the weaponization of outer space, in particular the implications of such a development for the Outer Space Treaty (resolution 2222 (XXI), annex) and future efforts to prohibit all forms of weaponry in outer space.

25. The Board recognizes the need to treat the weaponization of outer space as separate from but related to the issue of the revolution in military affairs. The weaponization of outer space is a danger that merits special focus, even independent of the revolution, while the revolution has special (e.g. regional) aspects that are independent of outer space.

26. The Board recognizes the need for greater institutional coordination in the United Nations system between offices that deal with outer space issues and those that deal with disarmament.

27. The Board will consider the issue at its next session.

H. Education for disarmament and non-proliferation

28. During its deliberations in 2000, the Board focused specifically on the issue of disarmament and non-proliferation education and recommended that the Secretary-General call the attention of Member States to this issue with respect to all levels of education,

from primary to higher education. The Board had specifically voiced its concern over the extent of public complacency over nuclear weapons issues today and viewed education as a useful means of addressing that problem.

29. Following the Board's recommendation, the General Assembly, on 20 November 2000, adopted resolution 55/33 E, entitled "United Nations study on disarmament and non-proliferation education", in which it requested the Secretary-General to prepare, with the assistance of a group of qualified governmental experts, a study on disarmament and non-proliferation education. The resolution further provided that the group of experts should invite representatives of organizations of the United Nations system with special competence in disarmament or education or both to participate in its work, and should also invite university educators, disarmament and peace-related institutes and non-governmental organizations that had special qualifications in education and training or in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation to make written and oral presentations to it.

30. The Board heard briefings from two of its members who are participating in the education study, Mr. Potter and Miguel Marín Bosch, who chairs the group of experts undertaking the study. As at September 2001, the study group had completed two sessions of work. In resolution 55/33 E, the Secretary-General was requested to submit his report to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

I. Civil society

31. The Board heard presentations from representatives of several non-governmental organizations during both of its 2001 sessions. At its thirty-sixth session, the Board was briefed by David Jackman (International Action Network on Small Arms and the Quaker United Nations office) and Michael Klare (Hampshire College). Both urged specific measures to expand NGO participation at the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, which was held in July 2001. At its thirty-seventh session, the Board heard presentations by David Atwood (President of the NGO Committee on Disarmament in Geneva), Felicity Hill (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom), and Peter Batchelor (Small Arms Survey). Mr. Atwood cautioned against any presumption that there was such a thing as the NGO "disarmament community", which clearly there was not. Ms. Hill referred to the Secretary-General's efforts to forge a "Global Compact" with the business community to promote global values, and challenged the Board to consider possible ways of promoting such values within the defence industrial sector. In discussing the annual yearbook, *Small Arms Survey*, Mr. Batchelor stressed the vital importance of impartial public information on all aspects of small arms and described his project's efforts to promote that goal.

32. The Board supports efforts in the United Nations system to facilitate NGO access to people and information about disarmament matters, to promote public education projects on disarmament and non-proliferation and to explore ways and means of engaging the defence industry in a dialogue — possibly in the context of the United Nations Global Compact — on the civic responsibilities of that industry.

II. Board of Trustees of the Institute

33. At the winter session, the Director of UNIDIR gave the Board, in its capacity as the Board of Trustees of UNIDIR, an interim update of the Institute's programme of work and adjusted budget estimates for the year 2001.

34. At its summer session, the Director of UNIDIR informed the Board that a subvention, used to cover the costs of the Director and administration, was necessary for the coming biennium. Such a subvention was important not only economically, but also to ensure the independence of the Institute. It was important to note that, for several years, the subvention had not been adjusted for inflation, while the salaries had been. In the period 1996-1997, the subvention was reduced from $220,000 to $213,000. The Director urged that the matter be taken up with some urgency as part of the effort to ensure the independence of UNIDIR and to facilitate growth in voluntary income. Efforts to ensure that it was increased to an adequate level and adjusted for inflation should be undertaken with increased vigour. Members of the Board took note of the Director's counsel and identified some possible approaches to addressing this issue.

35. At its summer session, pursuant to article III, paragraph 2 (b), of the statute of the Institute, the Board approved, for submission to the General Assembly, the programme of work and budget of the Institute for 2002 (A/56/359).

III. Disarmament information programme

36. The Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Jayantha Dhanapala, briefed the Board at its thirty-sixth session on the activities of the United Nations Disarmament Information Programme. The Board also discussed related activities of the programme at its thirty-seventh session, with particular reference to the importance of education in the fields of disarmament and non-proliferation. Throughout its deliberations, the Board stressed the importance of providing strong support for disarmament in civil society and recognized the extent that such support depended upon the availability of timely and reliable information about progress in all areas of disarmament.

IV. Future work

37. The Board proposed to include the following items in its future work:

(a) Continuation of the discussion of specific measures that would significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/54 K of 1 December 1999, particularly in regional contexts;

(b) Continuation of the discussion on the revolution in military affairs and its effect on disarmament and arms limitation, particularly in regional contexts;

(c) Outer space issues, particularly preventing the weaponization of outer space;

(d) Review of the third mandated function of the Board, namely, to advise the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations Disarmament Information Programme.

38. Other topics that could be considered are:

(a) Conventional disarmament;

(b) Cultures of violence;

(c) Small arms and light weapons;

(d) The threat of missile proliferation and the impact of missile defences, and related agreements and treaties;

(e) Challenges to multilateral approaches to disarmament;

(f) Biological weapons.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 42* (A/54/42), annex I.

[2] In June 2001, the film won the first-place "Gold Camera Award" at the International Film and Video Festival in Chicago, United States of America.

[3] A bibliography of materials on all subjects considered by the Advisory Board may be found on the Board's web site: http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/AdvisoryBoard/ which is maintained by the Department for Disarmament Affairs.

Annex

Members of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

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Ambassador of the Argentine Republic to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
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Notes

[a] Participated at the thirty-sixth session.

[b] Participated at the thirty-seventh session.

[c] New member in the thirty-seventh session.

[d] Resigned before the thirty-seventh session.